

Approved For Release 2004/09/28 : CIA-RDP88-01314R000300380049-9

Frederick Beebe, Chairman of Post Co., Dies

By Stephen D. Isaacs
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NEW YORK, May 1—Frederick Sessions Beebe, chairman of the board of The Washington Post Company, died here today of cancer. He was 59.

Mr. Beebe, "Fritz" to most acquaintances, was the company's principal corporate and financial figure here, as chief executive officer of the New York end of the company's operations.

A man of unfailing style and good humor, Mr. Beebe was once described by Philip L. Graham, late president of the newspaper, as a man who "looks like a square but who isn't."

He loved to match wits with the editors, enjoyed serious talks until the wee hours, and thrived gracefully on the amenities of life, from bounteous food to fine wines to his ever-present Don Diego cigars to his new summer home overlooking the Atlantic from Montauk, Long Island, to "Brio," the huge and gentle Briard dog given to him by his wife, to jazz and an enthusiastic game of tennis.

A Wall Street lawyer until the age of 47, Mr. Beebe was a principal figure in the purchase by The Post, in 1961, of Newsweek magazine and, as a result, changed careers to become chairman of The Post Company.

Even before moving to The Post, Mr. Beebe had been involved in most of its major decisions, as a partner in the prestigious New York firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore.

He had been assigned by his mentor there, Gen. Donald C. Swatland, to handle the estate planning and corporate legal matters of the family of Eugene Meyer, who purchased The Washington Post in 1933.

Over the years, Mr. Beebe became intimately involved in the legal and business affairs of family and company and was involved in The Post's 1954 acquisition of the old Washington Times-Herald.

After the death of Mr. Meyer in 1959, the company's reins passed to his son-in-law, Philip Graham, who relied even more heavily on the counsel of Mr. Beebe.

After the purchase of Newsweek, Mr. Graham asked Mr. Beebe to give up his treasured partnership in Cravath to become chairman of The Post company.

"He was a very promising younger partner in the firm," says Roswell Gilpatric, Cravath's senior partner and one of Mr. Beebe's closest friends, "and frankly, I envisaged that he would come along and ultimately be the head of the firm after me because he showed such leadership qualities."

"It was a very hard decision for him. He was devoted to the firm, but he felt this was a unique opportunity, not only to work with the family as a legal and financial adviser but to get into the running of the publications."

Mr. Beebe signed an agreement that amounted to a lifetime commitment to The Post Company.

He had just settled into his new duties in New York when, in 1963, Mr. Graham died.

Instantly, gently but firmly, Mr. Beebe assumed temporary control of the corporation, stabilizing it until Mr. Graham's widow, Katharine Meyer Graham, could take charge.

"In my view, we wouldn't be what we are today without Fritz," said Mrs. Graham, now president of the company and publisher of the newspaper. "The interesting thing about it is, in those early days, he, too, was learning. He hadn't been here very long."

As the new managerial system evolved, Mr. Beebe became the chief corporate figure of the New York-based magazine, as Mrs. Graham became that at the Washington-based newspaper, with constant consultation on other corporate business.

The Post Company continued the expansion that Mr. Meyer and Mr. Graham had begun, with purchases of Miami's WPLG-TV and Cincinnati's WCKY, the majority stock in Alexandria's Robinson Terminal Warehouse, a 30 per cent interest in the International Herald Tribune, establishment of a Newsweek subsidiary (Mr. Beebe's personal

creation), public sale of the company's Class B stock and, recently, announcement of an agreement to buy WTIC-TV in Hartford, Conn. For each, Mr. Beebe was The Post's principal negotiator.

At the same time, Mr. Beebe worked to consolidate and simplify the debt and financial structures of the company.

Over the 12 years of his chairmanship, said Mrs. Graham, "Fritz had a breadth of vision that included editorial as well as business judgment. He had a broad world view, which could mean either tough-mindedness or generosity. He could play the role of executive, but he left room for the off-beat. He had wit as well as wisdom, skepticism as well as belief."

"He was not bogged down in administrative structure. He was always willing to go along, but he was very good at downplaying things that got fashionable for a while. He had a sort of wisdom about proportions, how to keep things in perspective."

Mr. Beebe was born to a comfortable family in upstate New York. His father, Henry, was a civil engineer.

He attended a country day school in Utica where, he once told a student interviewer, "there was a great deal of emphasis on reading and writing so that I became, at quite an early age, hooked on the written word."

He attended Utica High School and, during the summers, did manual labor in a stone quarry and on road building jobs and even managed to earn enough that way during the Depression to own a car, for which he paid \$30.

From Utica High, he went on to Dartmouth, where he majored in English, and later to Yale Law. The Law Journal, he told the interviewer, was "a rather wonderful experience since you are forced to write concisely and accurately and to think hard about interesting legal

Gilpatric met Mr. Beebe

when Gilpatric was a visiting teacher at Yale Law and young Fritz Beebe was one of the school's top students. Gilpatric and other Cravath partners encouraged the bright young man to join their firm, which he did upon graduation in 1938. He became a Cravath partner in 1950.

His initial Cravath work under Gen. Swatland, he once told an interviewer, "involved very hard work and long hours under a strict disciplinarian with the very highest standards."

The background, said Gilpatric, produced "as good a lawyer as I know."

Gilpatric said that Mr. Beebe was "very tough-minded, a hard person to budge from a position once he arrived at it. He wasn't malleable in the sense that he quickly changed position."

He was old fashioned in the sense that he reasoned out a particular position by very careful analysis and research and thinking and then he would be very tough to budge unless you really could prove that he was wrong or overlooked something."

With all his legal and business acumen, Mr. Beebe was considered most jovial by all his associates.

Benjamin Bradlee, executive editor of The Post, said that Mr. Beebe had "a marvelous, marvelous commitment to quality that I'd never seen in a noneditorial person. But at the same time, he was a great tease . . . He had a kind of a wry, sardonic sense of humor. He was absolutely great company. He was very amusing and very, very smart."

Mr. Beebe, Bradlee said, was in many senses a father figure to a young, ebullient company and was always "there to lean on, to support, encourage, to comfort, to inspire. He was always there to help, especially when you were faced with tough decisions."

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"Fritz had a tremendous sense of what is right, of the proprieties," said Osborn Elliott, editor and now board chairman of Newsweek. Elliott recalls one example, when a Newsweek correspondent was wrongfully imprisoned in Turkey, and apparently left to languish in a cell.

"It was early on in his tenure here, and he endeared himself to me, certainly, and to those editors who heard about what he did. Fritz flew over to Turkey and took matters into his own hands, and got him out.

"This was really quite something for the chairman of the board to have done, and it was really more than a gesture: he had a great concern for the people who worked in this company."

"He had a New England Yankee sense of right ordering and fairness," said Alan R. Finberg, an associate of Mr. Beebe from the Cravath days, whom Mr. Beebe recently brought into Post Company management. "Unfairness and inequity offended him very fundamentally."

Elliott said that "Fritz had a sense of things other than corporate law and wills and estates. He had a real humanistic interest in society."

Modest but self-assured, Fritz Beebe loved to participate in Newsweek's editorial lunches with political figures, and was involved in several public associations. He was a director, as well as a member of the board of governors of the United Nations Association, a trustee of the Committee for Economic Development and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and of the Conference Board.

Corporately, he was the Meyer family representative on the board of the chemical company that Mr. Meyer co-founded in 1920, Allied Chemical Corp. (and was instrumental in the choosing of John T. Connor—an old Cravath associate—as Allied's president in 1967), and served on the boards of Bowaters Mersey Paper Co., Tri-Continental Corporation (a closed-end investment company here), Southeast Banking Corporation (a Florida bank-holding company) and of a Florida real estate firm, Sengra Development Corp.

During World War II, Mr. Beebe served in the office of the general counsel of the Navy, and was discharged as a lieutenant in 1946.

He married the former Liliane Petzl-Basny of Munich, Germany, in 1939. Mrs. Beebe was the only person who always called him "Frederick," not Fritz. They lived in a house on East 62nd Street in Manhattan and at their summer house in Montauk.

Mr. Beebe was an affectionate father to his two sons, Walter, a corporate lawyer in Manhattan, and Michael, who is running the family construction business, H. R. Beebe, Inc., in Utica. He is also survived by four grandchildren and a sister, Mrs. Lawton (Emily) Williams of Turin, N.Y.

Mr. Beebe's philosophy of business management was oriented not so much to facts and figures as to people. As Bradlee said, "he was innately skillful about human relationships" in his genial, affable but tough-minded way.

Mr. Beebe perhaps summed up his philosophy best in his response eight years ago to an inquiring graduate student, when he wrote:

"It is quite impossible for me to set forth a 'philosophy of management.' The best I can do is to say that the most important single ingredient is people—you have to understand and get along with them. You must have some sense of the direction that you are trying to move in and to get them to move along with you. Hard work and a questioning mind are also essential. Also, a sense of humor and a capacity for enjoying what you are doing would rank high on my list of virtues."